

# The Evolving Role of Higher Education in National Development Plans in Cameroon: Focus on the Period 2000 - 2030

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to investigate the consideration of Higher Education and its place in recent Cameroon National development policies. The focus was to explore the evolution of the role given to the HE sector for the country's transformation in the main National Development Policies that have been launched in the country since 2000, covering the period 2000-2030. The study used a primary mixed method combining documents analysis and interviews to get the contents and to understand the perceptions and meanings behind the orientations given to higher education in the national development policies. The findings presented that the role of Higher Education in Cameroon's development policies has been dynamic, from a less important to a more important role in the context of a Knowledge economy; they revealed a gradual increase of its importance (dynamism), a gradual adaptation of the sector to the global trend, an emphasis on higher education assistance to development, an emphasis on the adaptation of the sector to socio-economic needs for a more important contribution to the country's socio-economic development.*

**Keywords:** Cameroon, Higher Education, National Development policies, Knowledge economy, National innovation system.

## 1. Introduction

In the past couple of decades, important structural changes and processes frequently presented in terms such as globalization, the information age, the knowledge economy, and the knowledge society are significantly impacting the way we acquire, disseminate, transform and use knowledge. These changes have made knowledge production, transfer, and application, a major factor in national development strategies for gaining competitive advantages in the global economy (Carnoy et al., 2014; Cloete et al., 2011, p. 2, 2017; Lane & Johnstone, 2012; Uetela, 2017). As a consequence, the interest of policy-makers experts in the role HE institutions (hereafter HEIs) -which are important centers of knowledge creation and transformation- should play in the national development agenda has considerably increased; putting high pressure on the HE (hereafter HE) sector to align its work and resources with the changing needs of the countries' national development.

Cameroon did not have good economic performance in recent decades, falling short of the country's Vision 2035 goal of becoming a strong upper-middle-income country by 2035 (Ministry of Economy, 2009). This situation could only push or support the country in the adoption of the knowledge economy trend at least for a try, if not by confidence in the path. In this context, the role that academia has in the advancement and the achievement of national development and more so sustainable national development has become one of the most important debates in economic and political circles.

The main target of this research is to investigate the role (place) of HE in recent Cameroon national development policies. With the adoption of the knowledge society and knowledge economy trends that are promoting development through innovation, the specific mission of this paper is to

investigate the role of HE in the National innovation system (hereafter NIS).

## 2. University, National Development and the emergence of university new roles in the context of a more knowledge-intensive economy

### On university

In 1970 at the celebration of the transformation of the University of Dar Es Salaam into an independent national university, the President of Tanzania described the university as an "institution of higher learning, a place where people's minds are trained for clear thinking, for independent thinking, for analysis, and for problem-solving at the highest level" (Nyerere, 1970). In this short, but rich description, he did not miss any of the three missions of the university.

As he noticed, the university is a place to transmit advanced knowledge from one generation to the next so that it can be used as a basis for action or as a springboard for further research; it is also an institution that provides a center for the attempt to advance the frontiers of knowledge by concentrating in one place some of the most intellectually able people who are not preoccupied with day-to-day administrative or professional responsibilities, and making available to them good library and laboratory facilities that are required.

In this research, we use HE and university interchangeably, even if the university is just a part of the HE system. The HE system in Cameroon comprises the Ministry of Higher Education, the Universities, Policymakers, and Actors. In Cameroon, HE is a dual system that has 8 public universities and 226 private Higher Education Institutions representing respectively 83,72% and 16,28% of the student and staff bodies in Cameroon (MINESUP, 2019, pp3-5).

The current official education system in Cameroon owes its history to its last European colonial past as a former French and British Colony. As a result, the structure of the educational system including the HE system is dominantly a fusion of French and British education systems and thus a 'bicultural' education system composed of an English and French systems from primary school level to university education (Ng'ethe et al., n.d., p. 8).

### On national development

In this study, national development is taken as a whole in the sense of socio-economic development in the whole country. Socio-economic development is a composition of three elements: the two adjectives "social" and "economic", and the word "development". The word "development" which is the most important in these three elements is a broad a comprehensive concept. In Gilbert Rist's mind, it's a "Western belief" (Rist. 2001) attributed to countries to tell if they have reached a certain level (Pondi, 2011). Following this conception, are two types of countries: the developed countries and the developing countries; the latter is considered « a poor agricultural country that is seeking to become more advanced economically and socially » (Oxford Dictionary of English, (2005) as cited in(Celestin, 2011, p. 11). In this sense, Development is seen through the glasses of the modernization paradigm; this paradigm advances the order notion that all "traditional" societies should pass through similar stages to become modern societies (Etana, 2014, p. 2). For Svante (1996), it is relevant to distinguish development as a process (rate of change) and development as a condition (or level); however, whichever way you look at it, three variables can be measured: the development in terms of economic growth, the development in terms of human development and the development in terms of equality and wealth redistribution (Svante. E., and Al., (1996) as cited in(Celestin, 2011).

From the 1950s to the present, the conception of development has evolved from a narrower view, a quantitative dimension identifying development to economic growth measurable through GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth, to a richer conception; this second conception encompasses a qualitative dimension which is the human or the social development(Celestin, 2011, p. 27). Social or socio-economic development means the process of improving the quality of all human life; in a context of a country, it means that all the citizens should get as far as possible, equal and better opportunities in education, health care, good and increase in social amenities for housing, health, water, electricity, (Government, 2012, p. 3) real freedoms (and other services that can improve their life quality.

There is broad consensus that growth is essential to sustained poverty reduction, although it may not be a sufficient condition(Forum, 2003, p. 1). A scholar notes that "Historically nothing has worked better than economic growth in enabling societies to improve the life chances of their members, including those at the very bottom"(Rodrik, 2007).

If economic growth is said to be good for the poor or to reduce the poverty rate, why is poverty still an issue in any country across the world? Also, highly developed countries with advanced economies such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and so on are still experiencing poverty crises. While economic growth will certainly reduce poverty rates, some study also indicates that poverty reduction could also increase economic growth, not the other way round(DIFD, 2010). As in Lustig et al 2002's report, poverty reduction can help improve economic development. Pro-growth actions and those specifically directed at improving the lives of the vulnerable are most frequently mutually reinforcing. As a result, the more complementarity is tapped, the more efficient economic growth can be to minimize poverty. In this case, where economic growth did not substantially alleviate poverty, the reason can be found in the neglect of the social aspect. As we mentioned earlier, Socioeconomic growth which is the term used in this study includes a social aspect.

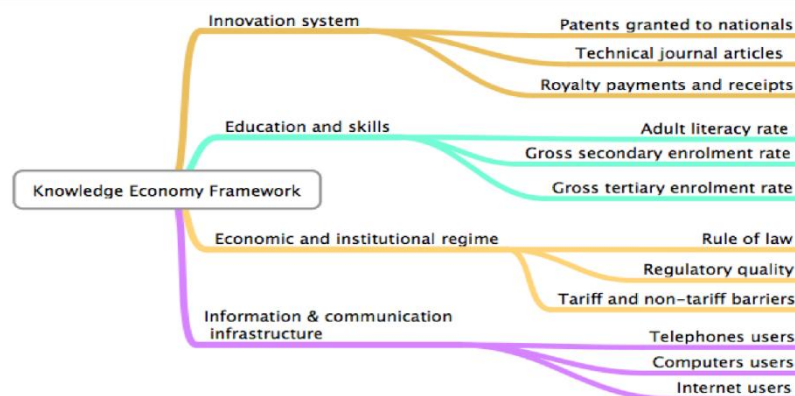
### Shifting theoretical framework on HE role in National development

An important element to understandingthe actuality of the changing role of HE in national development is the change operated in its theoretical framework on it. Before the emergence of the knowledge economy concept, HE's role in national development (hereafter ND) was mostly analyzed through the lens of the human capital theory as primarily an economic device. Developed in 1960 by the scholar Theodore Schultz, the human capital theory investigates and revealed the benefit of education for individuals and society(Peet et al., 2015; Tan, 2014). Human Capital Theory places a strong emphasis on individual education as a key means of gaining material advantage and moving the economy forward. In a nutshell, the more and better education an individual has, the better their financial rewards will be, and the more the national economy will prosper. This theory focuses on the two traditional missions of the university which are teaching and research and on its results which are the human capital production.

In recent years, there is a rise in a post-industrial and globalized economy characterized by:

*the growth of high-tech industries and the expansion of the scientific base; the move away from manufacturing to service- based economy; the development of new information technologies and accelerated technological change; the increasing complexity and sophistication of production processes; the reliance on specialist skills; the rising importance of the use and transfer of knowledge for economic activities and the implications of knowledge accumulation for production of further knowledge.*(Lindqvist et al., 2012, p. 13)

The Knowledge economy perspective places greater emphasis on the development of knowledge by knowledge workers for competitive purposes and, consequently, on the role of educational institutions in shaping the human resource embedded in the production of knowledge.



**Figure 1:** The knowledge economy framework

Source: (AHMED, 2016, p. 81) As we can observe in Figure 1, the economic system under the KE has accentuated the focus on non-material assets such as innovation, skills, and institutions. This has led to a big change in the theoretical underpinnings of HE's role in general and in national development in particular. These important changes that have been followed by profound reforms of the innovation process have resulted in knowledge production becoming increasingly important, closer and more directly linked to global competitiveness and socio-economic development efforts and strategies (Cloete et al., 2011; Pillay, 2011; Santiago et al., 2008; Williamson, 2006, p. 1); it also led to a widely defended position considering knowledge more critical than ever before in national development strategies.

With the emergence of the knowledge economy, the university missions are no more focused only on their two fundamental tasks: "the distribution of established knowledge (teaching students and the dissemination to the wider society) and the creation of new knowledge (research)" (Engwall, 2020, p. 6). The assistance to development or the third mission which began with the emergence of the Land Grant University in the US has been updated and developed to even eclipse in a certain way the two traditional missions of the university.

### **New roles of higher education in national development**

#### ***New models of collaboration between HEIs and external actors***

The increasing importance of knowledge in socio-economic development has led to a shift in the orientation of knowledge creation. As Lindqvist remarks, there is an emphasis "for knowledge to be marketable and economically useful", so that it can be easily commercialized and introduced into the economic system (Lindqvist et al., 2012, p. 14). This requirement goes beyond the traditional missions of the university and brought to the table the development of conditions that help in introducing the knowledge created in the economic network. It is in this context that new models for collaboration were proposed and developed as a key institutional framework to accompany the post-industrial knowledge-based economy. Among these models, one of the most used is the triple Helix framework developed by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). It is an approach to systems of innovation that analyses dynamic interactions

between the government, the university, and the industry that foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth (Spinoglio, 2015). Three main elements make up the triple-helix model. The first is the consideration that HEIs in general and the university in particular play a more determinant role in innovation processes, alongside industry and government. The second element concerns the move toward collaborative relationships between the three institutional spheres, in which innovation is increasingly considered as the result of interaction rather than government recommendation. Third, each institutional sphere, in addition to fulfilling its traditional functions, assumes the role of the others, operating both horizontally in their traditional function and vertically in their new role (Afzal et al., 2018; Etzkowitz, 2008a; Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013).

In the context in which the university is involved to contribute better to national development, the university serves as a source of firm formation of national and regional development in addition to its traditional role as a provider of education and research. The government is expected to encourage new developments through regulatory changes, tax breaks, and the provision of public venture capital, while the industry accompanies HEIs in the development of training and research.

#### ***The enterprise/entrepreneurial university***

The concept of an entrepreneurial university is closely related to the University's third mission (Etzkowitz, 2004; Ozturk, 2001; Tripp et al., 2015), which encourages universities to be consciously and proactively engaged in socio-economic development and activities that generate sources of income. According to Etzkowitz (2003), the concept of the entrepreneurial university is another historical transformation, a kind of "second revolution of universities," adding a socioeconomic development mission to the University's third mission. The entrepreneurial University generates the ability of universities to complete trilateral cooperation between their roles of training, research, and service, which are enshrined in many universities' mission statements (Etzkowitz, 2008b, p. 630).

The Entrepreneurial University, also known as the Enterprise University, focuses on the development of the "entrepreneurial person" and "entrepreneurial mindset" (Gibb et al., 2012, p. 10); the latter refers to a set of personal



skills, attributes, behavioral and motivational capacities (associated with those of the entrepreneur) that can be used in any context (social, work, leisure et.). The following abilities are required: autonomy, opportunity identification, intuitive decision making, strategic thinking, initiative taking, networking, creative problem solving, and self-efficacy (Gibb et al., 2012, p. 10). Concerning the "entrepreneurial mindset," it focuses primarily on the concept of "being your own boss," but also on an individual's ability to work in an unpredictable external environment and the associated entrepreneur ways of doing things, communicating, thinking, feeling, learning, and organizing.

To develop her entrepreneurial orientation, the University is expected to acquire some of these individual skills at the institutional level. In the literature on entrepreneurial universities, Clark (2004; 1998) proposes two emerging concepts: "self-reliance" and "the innovative University" as major conceptual frameworks on which the university should focus in its path to entrepreneurialism (Clark, 2004).

### ***The contribution to regional development***

Regional development is considered by Holttä (2000) as "the existence, creation, and strengthening of informal and formal linkages as a set of functioning institutions, organizations, funding structures and streams, interactive networks and forums for collaboration, for the pursuit of common economic, social and cultural goals". This definition considers that regional development concerns the creation and the strengthening of interactions between institutions and their surrounding society for mutual benefits.

In the theoretical analysis of their new role in regional development, three main dimensions emerge knowledge creation in the region through research and its exploitation through technology transfer; human capital formation and knowledge transfer; and cultural and community development contributing to the milieu, social cohesion, and sustainable development (Marginson & Marjik., 2007).

Due to their multi-faceted functions, HEIs have several outputs forms of contributions. Apart from their direct economic impact, previous research identifies as many as eight different functions or outputs of modern research universities: (1) creation of knowledge, (2) human-capital creation, (3) transfer of existing know-how, (4) technological innovation, (5) capital investment, (6) regional leadership, (7) knowledge infrastructure production and (8) influence on regional milieus (Goldstein, 2012; Lindqvist et al., 2012; Peter, 1987).

### **3. Methodology**

This research has used document analysis as a qualitative research method in a historical perspective to investigate the motivations and the content of the different roles or places given to HE in Cameroon.

The historical perspective refers to understanding a subject in light of its earliest phases and subsequent evolution, which allows the researchers to sharpen their vision of the

present. Within the scientific research, the new findings start, to a great extent, from elements that were already stated. The historical perspective on educational research is useful in addressing and resolving issues that scientific knowledge in the field of education is currently facing. The timeliness of educational science is intimately linked to its history. As Albulescu and colleagues note, integrating historical perspectives on educational research into current scientific knowledge is a key factor in determining important innovations, developments, and improvements in educational theory and practice (Albulescu & Albulescu, 2016, p. 12).

In qualitative research, data analysis allows researchers to delve into and understand the behaviors, experiences, and meanings that people associate with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2009). Several scholars (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell, 2012; Herrera & Merceron, 2013; Snape & Spencer, 2003) have identified interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisuals as data sources in qualitative research. Documents are a type of data that a researcher can use to back up his or her research. Electronic or printed documents are both acceptable (Bowen, 2009). The information provided in documents is usually not created by the researcher but rather results from the collection and compilation of images and texts that document issues, experiences, and regulations, activities among other things (Bowen, 2009; Ingleby, 2012).

Documents can be primary or secondary. Primary documents include field notes from participant observations, interview transcripts, and photographs, to name a few, while secondary documents include demographic data, records, surveys, database information, and much more (Schensul et al. 1999). The documents used in this work are secondary. According to O'Leary (2014), documents come in three varieties: public records, personal documents, and physical evidence. Personal documents include emails, blogs, individual websites, journals, and so on; public records include reports, handbooks, institutional/company websites, syllabi, and so on; and physical evidence includes photographs, artifacts, posters, and so on (Bowen, 2009; Taylor et al., 2016).

In this paper, we used public records, Cameroon state working papers, national maproad documents, and literature. An important part of the literature used for this research includes official texts and regulations and national development documents launched by the government.

Document analysis is the systematic examination and interpretation of documents to gain knowledge and insight (Bowen, 2009; Taylor et al., 2016). Coding data to create themes from which realistic conclusions or meanings can be drawn is part of document analysis. In a process known as triangulation, according to Bowen (2009), document analysis is frequently used to corroborate findings from other data sources, such as interviews. As a result, various documents serve as our data sources. We use document analysis to look at the themes that emerge from the literature as well as the documents.

## Higher education's place and role evolution Cameroon

### In the colonial era

The Higher education model as it exists in Cameroon and Africa today was introduced by the colonial administration. Before its introduction, there were local systems of education shaped by Africans through the interaction of societal needs. These systems were transferring cultural identity and maintaining a coherent way of life on the continent (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013, p. 36). However, with the history of wars over slave trades and the arrival of European powers in Africa as early as the 15th century, these indigenous African knowledge systems and learning spaces were disrupted, in some cases destroyed, and disappeared. With the arrival of these colonial powers and their colonial ideology, the continuity of African indigenous institutions, including education, was disrupted and replaced with new Eurocentric institutions over time (Engelbert Atangana, 2010; Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013).

As colonial administration gradually penetrated the social fabrics of African societies, local authorities' legitimacy as agents of cultural and institutional continuity began to erode.

Though various colonial administrations established European models of education at the end of the nineteenth century, their introduction was not smooth at the start of colonization due to some degree of suspicion and resistance by Africans. As a famous African scholar reminded us in a book published in 2006, "The reaction of Africans in general, when European education was first introduced, was characterized by the overwhelming rejection by leaders and the general population." (Assié-Lumumba, 2006, p. 30). Africans used the rejection of European schools and education as a form of resistance to being disconnected from their past ways of life and submission to the European way of life. In general, the goal of establishing higher education institutions in their colonies was not to address Africa's socio-economic problems; rather, it was to facilitate the smooth operation of their colonial administration.

### In the post-colonial era

Later in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when African countries started to liberate themselves from colonial domination, not only the stakeholders but also the role of African Higher education was going to change. Most of post-colonial Africa's higher education policy in the 1960s and 1970s was defined within the framework of national development strategies adopted in the region. The Higher education institutions were viewed as organs to support decolonization, and as tools of socio-economic development and political transformation in postcolonial Africa, with the role of training professionals, promoting access, expanding knowledge frontiers, and serving the national economy (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013, p. 37). As Mosha puts it, universities in African countries in that period were expected to play a pioneering role in addressing problems of poverty, social disorganization, low production, unemployment, hunger, illiteracy, and diseases (the problems of underdevelopment) that appeared to be widespread on the African continent (Sambuli Mosha, 2000, p. 194). Cameroon like many other in Sub Sahara Africa (hereafter SSA) were in a crucial need of HE

graduates to occupy positions in the new local government and public service (Fielding, 2014; Njeuma et al., 1999). To cover this need, the governments heavily invested to develop the sector.

Due to a severe economic crisis that hit the world, including Africa in the 1980s, strong neoliberal measures were adopted; cutting social sectors including education budgets in SSA including Cameroon. In Cameroon then, followed a difficult period in the HE sector characterized by a shrinking of public and international development partner's findings. During this hard time, a distrust in HE was developed and cultivated by several researchers (G. Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985; George Psacharopoulos, 1980) arguing against the role of HE in the development of Africa. Their main theoretical underpinning based on the rate of return analyses (RRA) stated that the social returns on investment in the lower levels of education, especially primary and secondary education significantly outweighed those in HE. This RRA provided evidence supporting analyses of human capital theorists such as Shultz (1961), Becker (1994), and Blaug (1965) who stated that HE was more a private than a public good. In 1986 in a meeting of Higher Education African Universities' vice-chancellors in Harare Zimbabwe, the World Bank argued that HE is a "luxury" rather than a need for development in Africa and other developing countries (Doh, 2012). Almost all the bilateral partners followed suit as if it was a fait accompli by emphasizing mainly primary and secondary education for the development of education in Cameroon as in other developing nations (Cloete et al., 2017, p. 7; Doh, 2012; Zaglul & Sherrard, 2006). As a consequence, official development assistance to tertiary education in Africa averaged just US\$110 million a year between 1990 and 1999, before rising to an average of US\$515 million a year during the 2000 to 2005 period (The World Bank, 2009, p. 59). This situation led to a dramatic decrease in the per capita investment in HE from 6,800 US\$ in 1980 to 1,200 US\$ in 2002 (Cloete et al., 2017, p. 7).

However, since the mid-2000s, there has been a gradual return of trust in HE, fueled by calls from people like Kofi Atta Annan (then-UN Secretary-General), who urged African countries to consider HE as a primary tool for socio-economic development in the twenty-first century. Since then, the World Bank has revised its policy frameworks for HE, stating that:

*Tertiary education institutions support knowledge-driven economic growth strategies and poverty reduction by (a) training a qualified and adaptable labor force [...]; (b) generating new knowledge, and (c) building the capacity to access existing stores of global knowledge and to adapt that knowledge to local use. Tertiary education institutions are unique in their ability to integrate and create synergy among these three dimensions... The norms, values, attitudes, ethics, and knowledge that tertiary institutions can impart to students constitute the social capital necessary to construct healthy civil societies and socially cohesive cultures (Bank, 2002).*

Since the beginning of the 2000s, most African governments, international partners, and development agencies are gradually reconsidering the role of HE, taking it as an important tool for enhancing human capital for national development. Following this move, some African countries (Zambia, Malawi, and Cameroon) have emphasized the use of higher education in their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, with Ethiopia and Cameroon planning significant increases in their higher education budgets (Doh, 2012). It is one of the facts that pushed us to conduct this research.

#### **In the decade 2000-2010: focus on the Poverty Reduction Strategies Papers**

The national development framework in the decade 2000-2010 was dominated by the Poverty Reduction Strategies Papers (Hereafter PRSP) produced by the Cameroonian government and the International Monetary Fund (hereafter IMF). The first and main document explaining in detail the whole strategy was launched in 2003 to cover the period 2003-2006. In 2006 and 2007, two other ones (which are just short revisions and adjustments) were published in the continuity of the main document of 2003. In these national roadmaps guiding the country to socio-economic development, the writers in the beginnings stressed poverty as the main problem and poverty reduction as what is supposed to be done in priority in the national development perspective (Forum, 2003; IMF., 2006; Ministry of Economy, 2003), especially for the period 2003-2009. The main objective of Poverty is to significantly reduce poverty, with a strong and sustainable economic growth, increased efficiency of public expenditure, more effective targeting of its poverty reduction policies, and improvement in overall governance.

To formulate and implement an effective poverty strategy, the 2003 PRSP investigated the main factors that "cause" or perpetuate poverty in Cameroon (Ministry of Economy, 2003, p. 18). Econometric models were used to estimate the contribution of various determinants while taking into account marginal effects and interactions between factors. Using the main periodical national household surveys conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, a model was developed, providing a better understanding of how the various phases of poverty interact, and of their relative importance (Ministry of Economy, 2003, p. 19). The results showed that the "Level of education turns it to be a very significant explanatory factor", "The household head's sector of occupation is just as important", and that "The physical environment also has a significant impact on household living standards" (Ministry of Economy, 2003, p. 19).

The results of the analysis confirm those of the quantitative and qualitative surveys on the key components of a strategy for reducing poverty, in particular: (i) education and health for strengthening human capital; (ii) growth, particularly in the formal modern sector, for generating employment and income; and (iii) accessible infrastructure (roads, water, etc.) (Ministry of Economy, 2003, p. 19).

More specifically, the government's targets in the two PRSPs for 2015 are to:

- 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, by halving the proportion of Cameroonians living below the poverty line and suffering from hunger;
- 2) Achieve universal primary education by ensuring that all children can complete primary education;
- 3) Promote gender equality and empower women, by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education, if possible at all levels;
- 4) Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate at birth and among children under 5;
- 5) Improve maternal health, by reducing the maternal mortality rate by three-quarters;
- 6) Combat and stop the spread of HIV/AIDS, control the incidence of malaria and other major diseases, and reverse the spread of these pandemics;
- 7) Ensure environmental sustainability by reducing by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water, achieve significant improvement in housing by integrating sustainable development principles in national policies, and reverse the current degradation of environmental resources; and
- 8) Create a global partnership to develop information and communications technologies and implement policies and strategies that offer decent and productive work prospects to Cameroon's youth.

Although education was seen as a strategy to strengthen humans, the two PRSPs did not give any prominent role to HE; the Focus was on Primary Education, Secondary Education (IMF., 2006, pp. 48–50).

#### **In the decade 2000-2010: focus on the Growth and Employment Strategy**

In 2009, the Cameroon government issued two important national development documents. The first is a global vision, a long-term policy framework entitled "Cameroon vision 2035", and covering the period 2010 – 2035 (Ministry of Economy, 2009, p. III). The vision in this document is to make Cameroon a strong upper-middle income country by 2035. The general targets are as followed: reducing poverty to a socially acceptable level, becoming a medium-income country, becoming a Newly Industrialized Country, strengthening national unity, and consolidating democracy by promoting the ideals of peace, freedom, justice, social progress, and national solidarity

The second document published in 2009 was the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (Hereafter GESP). It operationalizes the first decade of the Cameroon 2035 Vision Document (2010-2020). In this working paper, the policy makers decided to adopt a more focused strategy, putting forward growth and employment; considering employment and growth as more powerful instruments for reducing poverty and improving the quality of life in the country (Doh, 2012; Government of Cameroon, 2009). As the Cameroonian scholar expert in HE and poverty reduction in Cameroon puts it, the GESP builds on a more realistic and narrow theoretical perspective that "growth" (including wealth formation, jobs, concrete unemployment, and under-employment) is a strategic vector for poverty reduction from an immediate contextual perspective (Doh, 2012).



In addition to the development of infrastructure and the modernization of the production processes of the national economy, "education" was included in the GESP alongside "health" in the expression "human development" as the key priorities of Cameroon (Ministry of Economy, 2009). GESP emphasizes education (including Higher Education) as a crucial strategy for the growth of human resources in the long term. The GESP underlines the need for some urgent changes, including 1) Infrastructural development and investment in teaching personnel Related to the expansion and diversification of the technical, technological, and professional more market-friendly components of the HE sector; (2) the establishment of partnerships between the university and related productive sectors (industries and socio-professional actors). (3)The development of continuing education coupled with mechanisms for the recognition of experience-based skills; (4) the digitization of the HE sector through implantation and use of the Latest Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). (5) Creation of a higher education field (for engineers and technicians). (6) Improving the support system through the award of merit-based scholarships to allow excellent students to achieve a doctoral level, maintain the standard and quality and pool of the university teaching and research personnel, as well as to improve their working conditions. (7) Regionalization, though a more in-depth analysis of the map of university establishments, to improve productivity and streamline the establishment of university establishments in response to decentral needs. (8). Provide the best conditions to guide student entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity. (9) Enhancing equality and providing opportunities for disadvantaged communities and maintaining gender equity in all aspects of the HE system.'(MINEPAT, 2013; Ministry of Economy, 2009, p. 78).

In the document, significant consideration of HE was noted as it was mentioned massively in the document. It is introduced as part of the growth strategy, especially in human development(Government of Cameroon, 2009, p. 70), which is part of the five main strategies for national growth.

For Higher Education to accompany the national development, the authorities intended to better control student enrolments with the growing popularity of the flow regulation system. They planned to increase the number of students in that are in the already regulated sub-system to 13.7 percent in 2009, and 25 percent in 2020. In the meantime, the authorities planned to continue investing in infrastructure and teaching staff, in professionalization in increasing the teaching while improving their working conditions. The government also planned that " graduates from professional schools (engineering, agriculture, public works, water and forestry, etc...) were going be more involved in the economic development process of the country through integration contracts during the execution of major projects"(Government of Cameroon, 2009, p. 76). In clear, HE has been asked to: "bring pertinent responses to the projects and challenges of economic growth" in Cameroon and to "Play a leading role for Cameroon becoming an emergent nation and its sustainable development", and to the overall "long term vision up to

2035" (Government of Cameroon, 2009; LAHAYE & JAROUSSE, 2013; MINEPAT, 2013). There was a net interest in using HE as a tool for national development.

#### **In the decade 2020-2030: focus on the NDS (2020-2030)**

In 2020. Cameroon government has launched a new periodical reference framework for its development action covering the decade 2020-2030. In this document, the policy makers decided to adopt a more focused strategy mostly oriented toward the industrial development of the country. The NDS intends to:

*carry out the structural transformation of the economy by making fundamental changes in economic and social structures in order to promote endogenous, inclusive development while preserving opportunities for future generations. The aim is to make the country a New Industrialized Country. To this end, efforts will be articulated around the industrialization strategy, which is therefore the focus of this national strategy* (Ministry of Economy, 2020, p. 4).

It is its goal of developing an important industrial network, the NDS stress on amelioration of the quality of education with soft skills that are necessary to strengthen the industries for the national development. To reach this goal, emphasis will be placed on the training of trainers, beefing up patriotism, and provision of technical and vocational training. Patriotism is important here because of the Brain drain.

In the NDS, it is mentioned that Higher education will involve : (i) giving priority to quality scientific and technological training to have a large mass of engineers and senior technicians qualified for exploitation and especially the processing of natural resources in sub-sectors that contribute to the most to industrialization, (ii) promoting applied research in universities and colleges in keeping with the technological catch-up plan, (iii) developing sectors for business intelligence and (iv) strengthening the certification system of certificates at the level of Private Institutes of Higher Education (IPES) for better harmonization of curricula and (v) improving the management of university supervisory bodies (NDSp72). The strategy of the government is to use HE as a major tool to upgrade the industrial level of the country.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper tried to give a perspective on how the role of HE has evolved through time in Cameroon's national development policies. We have noted that after the colonization, the local government used it as a tool to get human resources who could help in running the newly independent State. Due to the focus of the country on the production-based economic system, and a distrust in the sector that followed an economic crisis in the 1980s, the country has not strongly involved HE in the national development policies. It is from the 2000s with the economic recovery, and the return of trust from

international development agencies and partners that the country also gave a certain importance to the sector in the national development strategy. In the decade 2000-2010, the dominant governmental national development policies were focused on poverty reduction. They involved education as one of the tools for poverty alleviation but focused more on primary and secondary education. In 2009, the GESP that will become the main national development strategy gave a more important role to the HE sector, considering it as the main tool for growth. Following the knowledge economy trend, the place of HE has been upgraded in the NDS which covers the decade 2020 -2030. Focused on the industrialization of the country, this document reveals that the national authorities have decided to use HE as a major tool to upgrade the quality and the quantities of high-quality products produced in the country for national development. Four main observations can be made in the role given to HE in Cameroon's national development policies: first, a gradual increase of HE's importance; a gradual adaptation of the sector to global trends (knowledge economy); an emphasis on HE assistance to development and stress on adapting HE to the national socio-economic needs (through the decision to develop professional and technological education). The gradual shift to a more knowledge-intensive economy has brought national policies to increase the participation of HE in the national development plans. By 2030, Cameroon needs an expanded HE sector that can contribute meaningfully to the development of high-level human potential, and enhanced competitiveness through a more knowledge-intensive economy. To reach this, funding and quality improvement arrangements require to be implemented. The challenges Cameroon faces as a nation require collective and coordinated efforts by all role players. The question is: Are Cameroonian universities, representatives of the industry, and representatives of the State ready and willing?

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